

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF WHALES TO THE ABORIGINAL PEOPLE OF SOUTHERN SOUTH AUSTRALIA

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Aboriginal people in the coastal region of South Australia had a broad relationship with whales. This is reflected in their hunting and gathering economy, mythology and totemism, and with their historical interaction with the first Europeans who arrived to hunt the whale. This paper provides a cultural geographical view of Aboriginal associations with whales.

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INTRODUCTION

The importance of whales to both Aboriginal people and Europeans had an impact upon the nature of their relationship on the frontier of British expansion into South Australia in the early nineteenth century. In earlier times, coastal Aboriginal people feasted upon stranded whales, which also had significance as totemic ancestors to some groups. In the Lower Murray region, whales were the mythological source of their ability to make fire. After official European settlement in 1836, many Aboriginal people were involved directly and indirectly in whaling activities. To Europeans, whales were the basis of an industry that they hoped would help the Colony of South Australia to develop and prosper. In the developing Australian colonies, the whaling establishments were in need of manual labour, which Aboriginal people sometimes supplied. The first Europeans recognised the skill of Indigenous hunters, sometimes employing them as harpooners and whale spotters. As a region, southern South Australia is defined in this paper as the whole of the coastal zone and the surrounding temperate parts of the state.

SOURCES

The present study is part of a series of papers by the author that considers the historical and mythological relationships between Aboriginal

people and the southern South Australian landscape (Clarke 1995, 1996, 1997, 1998, 1999a, 1999b). Europeans recorded the information upon which it is based from Aboriginal people who had lived in the southern districts prior to and during the early phases of European colonisation in South Australia. The material available consists of the observations from Europeans involved in the colonial process. The German missionaries, Christian G. Teichelmann, Clamor W. Schürmann and Heinrich A. E. Meyer actively recorded the culture of the local Aboriginal people. Their publications were essentially studies of Aboriginal language and religion (see Teichelmann & Schurmann 1840; Teichelmann 1841; Meyer 1843, 1846; Schurmann 1844, 1846). The records of William D. Wyatt (1879) from the late 1830s came from his official investigations into the admissibility of Aboriginal evidence in court.¹ Richard Penney was involved in the welfare of Aboriginal people in the Encounter Bay district. Later sources, such as George Taplin (Journals; 1874; 1879), acknowledged the first recorders, such as Meyer, as major sources of primary data. These observers had a practical interest in Aboriginal religion and traditions, in spite of the fact that their records were compiled before the development of anthropological theory. From them the early relationship between Europeans and Aboriginal people can be interpreted.

During the twentieth century, with the development of scientific methods with obtaining anthropological data, much additional

¹ Quarterly Report (1 October to 31 December 1837) from Wyatt to the Colonial Secretary, dated 1 January 1838 (Colonial Secretary Reports, 1838/3 & 1838/69, Public Records Office, Adelaide).

ethnographic material was collected from southern South Australia. Norman B. Tindale (1937, 1938, 1974, 1986, 1987), the Curator of Anthropology at the South Australian Museum, published the results of his fieldwork with the descendants of Aboriginal 'tribes' in southern South Australia.² The social anthropologists, Alfred R. Brown (1918), Ronald M. Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt (Berndt 1940; Berndt & Berndt 1993) recorded Aboriginal culture and traditions in this region. The twentieth century ethnographic sources are essentially attempts to record a pre-European culture, as it would have been lived by the generations preceding that of their informants. The popular accounts of southern South Australian mythology by Charles P. Mountford and Ainslie Roberts were chiefly based on the published records of Tindale. A more detailed analysis of the chief historical sources used in this paper is given elsewhere (Clarke 1994: 63–81, 417–425; 1995: 145–146; 1999a: 52–53).

PRE-EUROPEAN PRACTICES

The coastline of South Australia is part of the migration route of the southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*) from the Southern Ocean. Occasional strandings of whales were events that attracted many Aboriginal people for feasting. Daisy Bates recorded that the Wanmaring local group at the Head of the Bight in western South Australia had 'occasional gorges in large fish food, dead whales and other large sea creatures being found after some great storm'.³ Aboriginal

people considered that they had an active role in some strandings. For example, songs were used by 'strong men' of the coastal Lower Murray groups to 'cause' whale strandings (Tindale 1974: 18, 23–24, 80).⁴ People from surrounding areas converged on the dead whale, being called by the aroma of a stranding, if not the messages sent out. In the Aboriginal languages around Adelaide and Encounter Bay the whales of all species were collectively called *kondoli*.⁵ Tindale records another term for them that referred to their water blowing. Tindale says:

The whales which frequented the shores off the mouth of the Murray River and the rocks at Encounter Bay where they often came close in shore were called *winkulare*, literally the 'whistlers' or 'blowers' from the intransitive verb *winkulun* 'whistle' because of their 'blowing'. Magical spells designed to entice the whales ashore were practised by the 'clever' men.⁶

For the Lower South East of South Australia, there is a transcription of a whale song in the 'Booandik' language (Smith 1880: 139). This was translated as 'The whale is come. And thrown up on land.' These lines were repeated over and over, perhaps to induce a stranding.⁷ Evidence from elsewhere in Australia, such as the rock art around Sydney in New South Wales, suggests that coastal Aboriginal people had a keen interest in whales.⁸

Aboriginal people of the whale descent group at Encounter Bay believed that some of them could 'sing' whales in towards the shore or out, by standing on a rock and singing some 'wordless chant'.⁹ Tindale (1937: 107, 112) recorded a whale song, in the Ramindjeri dialect

² Tindale's journals, field notebooks, and the 'Milerum' manuscript are also important ethnographic sources. This material is housed in the Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

³ 'The Passing of the Australian Native. The Wanmaring Group (Head of the Great Australian Bight).' D. M. Bates manuscript collection at the Barr-Smith Library in Box 12/Section XIII/Part 6b.

⁴ Aboriginal people claimed in the early 1980s that an elderly Ngarrindjeri person living at Point McLeay, who had recently died, knew how to 'sing a song to bring in whales'. Also in the early 1980s, some elderly Ngarrindjeri informants knew that there was a myth concerning whales and fire, but had forgotten the details (audiotape of the Cameron family talking at Kingston South East with P. G. Jones, S. J. Hemming & P. A. Clarke, 23 April 1983. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

⁵ In the Adelaide area, whales were termed 'con-dol-ley' (Williams 1839 [1840: 295]), 'kondolli' (Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840 2: 12) and 'condolle' (Stephens 1889: 498). For the Lower Murray dialects, the name for whale is recorded as 'kondarli' by G. Taplin (1879 [1874]: 1879) and F. Taplin (Point McLeay Letter Books, 1879–84, p.98), 'kondolle' (Wyatt 1879: 170), 'kandarli' (Howitt 1904), 'kondolly' (M. Wilson in 'conventional mission script' [Tindale 1930–52: 161–165]), 'kondolly', 'kondal' (Tindale 1934–37), 'kondoli' by Tindale (1937), 'kondali' (Mountford & Berndt 1941), 'kondole' by Mountford and Roberts (1969) and 'kondili' by Berndt and Berndt (1993). This paper uses 'Kondoli' as a standard term for the Whale Ancestor.

⁶ Tindale ('Milerum' manuscript, stage A, no.3. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

⁷ After European settlement, Aboriginal people of the South East of South Australia also had a popular song about the 'whale fishery' at Rivoli Bay (Stewart n.d. [1977: 65–66]).

⁸ Whales are major elements in the rock art in the Sydney area. At least one site appears to show a feast around a stranded whale (Campbell 1899: 46–47, pl. 24, fig. 1; Stanbury & Clegg 1990: 22–23, 54, 80–83, 113, 119). In September 1790, Tench (1793 [1996: 134]) records the feasting of a stranded whale which was 'in the most disgusting state of putrefaction' in the Sydney region. Kingston (1876: 277–278, 327) gives a related account from north of Sydney.

⁹ *The Mail* newspaper, 19 August 1932. There are recent accounts recorded by Bell (1998: 320) concerning Aboriginal people formerly using whales for transport, although these are unsupported by the historical record.

of the northern end of Encounter Bay, to send whales away.¹⁰ This was sung by a man of the *kondoli nga:tji*, or whale descent group, in order to assist a female whale and calf escape the shallow waters of Encounter Bay.¹¹ In this account, other people who were 'evil-minded', desired the whales to be stranded so that *kraipunuk* or oil could be collected for 'spear poison', perhaps as a sorcery material used against people who had the whale as their totemic familiar or *nga:tji*. Tindale stated:

A man who had the whale as totem would not eat whale. If a whale became stranded on the coast, he would give permission for others to use it as food, but he himself would merely rub himself with the oil which it produced. If he saw a whale floundering off the shore, he would sing a magical song, telling the whale to avoid the shallows and escape to the sea.¹²

Tindale stated that to decorate themselves the men of the Warki and Tangani groups of the Lower Murray region would be ruddled with red ochre and whale oil.¹³ Elsewhere in southern South Australia, it is also likely that whales were considered to be totemic beings, although apart from the Lower Murray region, the available early ethnographic data is slim.

The whale was associated with the Latalindjera descent group, which received its name from the place, Latang, at Hindmarsh River near Victor Harbor at Encounter Bay (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 311). To the south of Encounter Bay, Kondilindjarung ('whale, place-name marker') was a death place for whales, where one or two often beached themselves during the winter months (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 81, 103, 320, 326–327, 342, 565). It is situated on the Younghusband Peninsula on the seaside, south east of the Murray Mouth but north west of Noonamena. It was claimed that Kondilindjarung was where the people of this group and their associated beings, the whales, attempted to return before death. The Coorong ocean beach was

renowned for its whale remains. Tindale records that:

On the ocean beach one might be the inhabitant of another world, composed of sand, sea, spume, and giant whale bones. The scattered bones of blue whales lie here and there along the beach, for this is a graveyard where the great circumpolar current impinges upon the shores of Australia and casts up its burden of flotsam.¹⁴

According to the Berndts, Kondilindjarung is in the Kondilindjera descent group territory, believed to be an offshoot of the Ramindjerar, but who spoke Tangani instead. The relationship between the Kondilindjera and the Latalindjera descent group described by Tindale above is uncertain.¹⁵ The presence of the Kondilindjera on the south eastern side of the Murray Mouth may well have been the result of a post-European adjustment in territory, as Taplin (1874 [1879: 2]; 1879: 34) recorded the Kondarlinyeri as a 'clan' based on the north western side of the Mouth. Kondarlinyeri was said to mean 'belonging to whales' (Taplin 1879–84: 98). Brown (1918: 252) provided evidence that suggests that there were no 'Kondarlinyeri'. He stated 'I was told by the natives that Kondarlindjeri (the place of the whales) is merely the name of a part of the country occupied by Pankinderar clan, and that there is no clan of this name (Brown 1918: 252).'

During his fieldwork, Brown (1918: 240) considered it too late to obtain detailed information on the totemism of the Yaraldi people. Nevertheless he claimed:

The men and women of a clan might eat, and did eat, their totem, if it were edible, but they were careful to destroy all the remains (bones etc.), lest they should fall into the hands of an enemy and be used for evil magic. Some part of the totemic animal was in some instances used as a badge of the clan. Thus the Liwurinderar used to carry pelican skins on their spears when they went out to fight (Brown 1918: 241).

¹⁰ See Tindale (1931–34 (1): 252–253) for notes of 'Kondoli Tungar or Whale Song of the Ramindjeri tribe at Encounter Bay, Song 14'.

¹¹ Tindale inscribes a draft typescript version of his paper with 'much of the song data given verbatim as dictated by Milerum'. Here it is stated that the whales were swimming in 'white sand water'. Other details include that the whales were 'mother' and 'son' and that whale 'slime' or oil was required to rub on their bodies with red ochre as a base for poison (copy in E. H. Davies papers, AA309, Accession no.1, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

¹² Tindale, *The Advertiser* newspaper, 14 May 1936. The symbolic importance of whales may be reflected in the rock art of the Sydney area, which depicts people inside whales. Stanbury & Clegg (1990: 22–23) suggest that this might be explained by the eastern seaboard practice of sick people lying inside the body of a stranded whale.

¹³ Tindale ('Milerum' manuscript, folder 1, draft A. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

¹⁴ Tindale, *The Advertiser* newspaper, 12 May 1936.

¹⁵ Tindale (Lower Murray Totems Chart, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) links together the descent groups of Kondolinyeri (Taplin 1874 [1879]), Kondarlinyeri (Taplin 1879), Kondarlinyeri (Howitt 1904), and Karagarindjeri [equivalent to Kondolindjeri] (Tindale ms). He does not list the Latalindjera.

This account is consistent with Meyer's claim that the *nga:tji* was a 'friend', 'countryman' or 'protector' (Meyer 1843: 86; 1846 [1879: 198]) and Taplin's definition of it as a 'tribal symbol' or 'tutelary genius' (Taplin 1874 [1879: 1, 63–64, 134]). The Berndts also record that some people were able to eat their *nga:tji*. Regarded as the flesh of the Kondilindjera, the members of this Lower Murray group alone could make the first cut on a beached whale carcass (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 81, 103, 320, 326–327, 342, 565). Other groups would wait until they had eaten.¹⁶ The spirit of Kondoli departed through Kondilindjarung, leaving its meat for its 'brothers'. In this area, Aboriginal people possessed a pre-European system giving certain groups rights and privileges to the resources of the sea (see Peterson & Rigsby 1998).

The Kondilindjera responded to a whale stranding by sending messengers with invitations to neighbouring groups to come in for a feast on whale blubber, *pailpuli*, and meat, *mami*.¹⁷ Normally, the coastal districts were sparsely populated during the wintertime (Tindale 1938: 21; 1974: 61–62; Clarke 1994: 182–183). The cutting of the flesh and blubber was performed with flint knives, *maki*. Aboriginal people cooked the fat before it was eaten and the oil was rubbed on their bodies for protection against the weather. The *witjeri*, leaves of the pigface (*Carpobrotus rossii*), were used as a relish with the meat. Ceremonies were held during the nights of the feast. The site of the stranding was not left until all the blubber was eaten. Aboriginal people used the ear bones as drinking containers and water storage vessels.¹⁸ Aboriginal midden material collected from Moana, a sand dune area near the mouth of Pedlar Creek south of Adelaide, by Tindale in the 1920s contains sperm whale teeth and dolphin vertebrae.¹⁹ This suggests that Aboriginal people had eaten beached whales and dolphins. Also, in the Rivoli Bay area, south of Encounter Bay, whales were also

sometimes stranded. Aboriginal people called this place Weirintjam or Wilitjam, which Tindale claimed meant 'place of whales' from the Potaruwutj word 'weirintj', a whale.²⁰ It was a place noted by Tindale's informants for the whales that became stranded there, providing big feasts for the local people.

It is unlikely that Aboriginal people in South Australia were able to use their watercraft, built for calm water conditions, in killing small whales.²¹ For marine animals stuck in shallow water or stranded on land, killing was a more straightforward task. Nevertheless, hunting across the open sea was limited. For instance, Ramindjeri people swam or travelled on rafts to West Island, which is less than a kilometre off the coast south west of Victor Harbor, to kill sea lions (*Neophoca cinerea*) and fur seals (*Arctocephalus forsteri*) (Tindale 1941: 241). They also travelled to Pullen Island on rafts in calm weather for sealing.²² Most distant islands, such as Kangaroo Island, were places beyond the range of Aboriginal hunters immediately prior to European settlement (Clarke 1996, 1998). There is no evidence to suggest that Aboriginal people actively hunted whales or dolphins.

WHALES IN ABORIGINAL MYTHOLOGY

The earliest written account of whale mythology in South Australia was by C. Teichelmann in 1840, presumably recounted by Aboriginal people who lived in the Adelaide area (see Amery 1998: 219, 224). He records:

When the lark and the whale were men, they fought against each other. The lark speared the whale twice in the neck. The whale, finding itself sorely wounded, made its escape, jumped from pain into the sea, became a whale and spouted through the two wounds water to heal them; but in vain, till this day.²³

¹⁶ Bates (1985: 197–198) records that the *mammang borungur* or whale totem people of Cape Leewin in the South West of Western Australia also ate the flesh of stranded whales, in spite of the fact that this was not the practice of people from other totems.

¹⁷ Wyatt (1879: 170) claimed that Encounter Bay people also called whale blubber 'kondolle'.

¹⁸ South Australian Museum specimen A49445; container made from a whale ear bone, collected from Pelican Point on the Coorong, donated by Mrs O. T. Cleggett, 1940s.

¹⁹ Ross (1984: 19–41) provides an overview of the archaeological investigations based at Moana. This material would be less than 6,000 years before present, when the coastline of present-day Adelaide was largely formed. The sperm whale teeth found in Moana 'Site C' may have come from a multiple stranding, as they are from at least two individuals, one young and one old specimen (C. Kemper, pers. com.).

²⁰ N. B. Tindale (Geographic Place Names Cards & Potaruwutj Vocabulary Cards, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). Tindale thought that the variation in the place name, Wilitjam, is probably relatively modern.

²¹ In contrast, Aboriginal hunters in northern Australia had more access to the sea through their use of dugouts and outriggers gained through contact with Macassans and Torres Strait Islanders. For a description of their watercraft, see Haddon (1913), Tindale (1926: 103–112) & Baker (1988).

²² See also Tindale (Wunindjeri clan entry in 'Clan Data' folder in 'Milerum' manuscripts, stage 2 Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

²³ *South Australian Colonist* newspaper, 7 July 1840.

The same corpus of whale mythology appears to have been shared by the Adelaide and Encounter Bay peoples, perhaps reflecting Aboriginal movements around the time of European settlement in the early nineteenth century. In a Ramindjeri account of the myth, whales are connected with the origin of fire (Meyer 1879: 202–204). Here, it was believed that once long ago, all the Ramindjeri people gathered to dance at Mootaparinga (Cut Hill, along Hindmarsh River).²⁴ They did not have a fire, so they had to dance all day and it was hot. Their perspiration dripped down and became the large ponds there, and hills and valleys formed through the buckling of the ground caused by the stamping of their feet. Eventually, they sent for Kondoli, a large and powerful man who possessed fire. He came, but hid his fire. This made the Ramindjeri angry. Another Ancestor, Riballi, threw a spear at Kondoli, hitting him in the neck.²⁵ The commotion this caused transformed most of the people there into different animals, such as fish and birds. Kondoli himself rushed into the sea and ever after blew water out of his wound. Riballi took Kondoli's fire and placed it in a grasstree (*Xanthorrhoea* species), where it can be removed by using the dried flower stems as fire-sticks.²⁶

The series of accounts recorded by Tindale in the twentieth century provide details that were not part of Meyer's account. In May 1934, Tindale received a Ramindjeri version of the Kondoli myth from Frank Blackmoor (Tindale 1930–52: 161–165; 1934–37: 181–184).²⁷ Here, Kondoli was a big man who possessed fire that fell from his body as he danced. He came to participate at a Ramindjeri ceremony. Kuoldambal the Owl argued with Krilbalil (= Krilbali) the Lark about who was to spear Kondoli to get the fire. Kuoldambal, who had large eyes, wanted

Krilbali's spear to use, as his eyes were too small to see properly. But when the dancing was close enough, Krilbalil grabbed his spear and struck Kondoli at the back of the head, making the fire fall out. Krilbalil grabbed the fire and placed it amongst grasstrees, causing the scrub to burn. People now had access to fire. Kondoli dived into the ground, eventually coming out and going into the sea.

Tindale recorded a version of the 'Story of Kondoli' from Milerum, a Tangani speaker, in May 1936 (Tindale 1934–37 vol.2: 232–235). In this account a 'tribe' that was part Mereldi (Murray River people), part Ramindjeri and Yoltindjeri (= Joltindjeri) planned to have a *molkaldi* type ceremony at which all participants would perform. Messengers were sent out in all directions and people gathered at Mutabaringga (= Mootaparinga), a site on the largest bend of the Hindmarsh River. The dancing area was at a flat on top of a range that had a depression. Kondoli, who was a big man, was camped at Brown Hill. He carried the flint with which fire could be made.²⁸ A 'river man' (Murray River person) called Ratanangi, the Robin Redbreast Bird, was there. Seven or eight Teiwuri (Brown Treecreeper) women from a local group, who greatly desired Ratanangi, grabbed him.²⁹ Relatives among the 'river people' grabbed their weapons and a fight with spears and waddies (clubs) took place. Firesticks were also thrown through the air.

To escape the fight, Kondoli fled towards the sea down Hindmarsh Valley, carrying his flint. He also had pieces of granite, which he dropped as boulders along the creek. At the site of Gay Bridge, Port Elliot (Kandeining) he took a boulder out into the sea. After returning and heading a little further inland he rested before diving into the sea at Kantjoar, where there is a swamp.³⁰

²⁴ Colonists used Mootaparinga (or Murtaparri) in the 1830s as the name for the mouth of Hindmarsh River at Encounter Bay (Wade cited Gouger 1838: 25; Mann cited Gouger 1838: 39, 42; Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840 2: 75). In the Adelaide language Mootaparinga reputedly means 'brackish water' (Robinson 1975: 44). If so, then it appears to be a term from a language north west of the Lower Murray. Adelaide terms, such as *murta* ['excrements of animals'], *parri* ['river'] and *-ngga* [grammatical 'in'] (Teichelmann & Schürmann 1840 1: 22; pt 2: 25, 38, 76) appear relevant, possibly translating as 'animal manure water, place of'. Tindale ('Myths' folder in 'Milerum' manuscript collection, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) says 'Mutabaringga' is known by Europeans as Cut Hill.

²⁵ The 'Riballi' of Meyer is probably his rendering of 'Krilbali', the brown skylark.

²⁶ The use of fire is a major element of the Waiyungari mythology (Clarke 1999b). Bell (1989: 321–322, 427) speculates that whales are of special significance to Aboriginal women due to the link with fire and through associating the protective nature of whales over their calves with human child-care responsibilities.

²⁷ Yaraldi man, Mark Wilson (Thalrum or Thralrum), wrote the original text using conventional mission script. Tindale then annotated it by working directly with Frank Blackmoor, a Yaraldi man of the Piltindjeri descent group. Although Tindale refers to the Skylark as 'Krilbalil', I prefer the form 'Krilbali', as written by other authors and as recognised by some contemporary Ngarrindjeri people (see foot note 44).

²⁸ The flints were struck whilst being held in a dry pad of fungus, *kumpalatingi* (Mountford & Berndt 1941: 342–344).

²⁹ Tindale (1934–37: 233) records that as a result of what happened then, 'today you always see him [Ratanangi, Robin Redbreast] with seven or eight wives'.

³⁰ According to Tindale (Geographic Place Names Cards, Anthropology Archives, South Australian Museum), Kantjoar is a site in the Ngurunderi myth where he urinated (*kaindji* = urine).

From here, Kondoli went west along the shore, sometimes walking and other times swimming in water for safety. He walked between Granite Island and the shore, looking back to see if the others were following him. When Kondoli reached Wunangg, the mouth of the Inman River, he saw his friend Yamakawi rushing down the Inman towards him.³¹ The 'wild men' were chasing Yamakawi for his firestick, made of *ngalaji* (dried flower stem of the grasstree), that he carried. Although Kondoli had eluded his first pursuers, he had to flee again, this time with Yamakawi. Kondoli went a little way into the sea and turned into a whale. There is a reef there today and the spray that rises with the waves is the whale spout, which represents smoke. Yamakawi went into the sea at Narailkang, near Waitpinga, and turned into a shark with big teeth.³² For some time, people on the land had no fire as Yamakawi had taken away the *ngalaji*. Kondoli did not go far away as he had left something back at his camp. The people 'sang' (charmed) him into the shore, where they jumped on him and took his flint so that they could make fire. They also grabbed Yamakawi's firestick, which had been used as a back fin.

In another of Tindale's records, Kondoli the Whale man chased the Shark man who had stolen Kondoli's fire-making equipment, *wintjimi*, comprised of flint and pyrites.³³ This occurred at Spring Mount, which was called Mutabaringga, said to mean 'sacred magic doctor's place'. The hill represents Kondoli, who later became a whale. A big hole at the summit was said to be the 'blow hole' of the whale. Kondoli chased the Shark man to Brown Hill, called Kondolanang.³⁴ From here Kondoli in anger rushed towards the sea in pursuit of the thief. Kondoli was transformed into a whale

at Elliot Beach, called Kandeining, which was translated by Tindale's informants as 'from here'.³⁵ The Shark man was transformed into the whale's enemy, the shark, who retains the fire flints as teeth in his mouth. Tindale linked this account to the name of the south western spur of the Brown Hill, Nangge-we:ke, which he claimed means the 'stolen sun', referring to the stealing of fire.³⁶ In what appears to be a related account, Tindale stated:

One of the myths of the area tells how there was contention between a man of the whale totem and another, the shark, for possession of the fire flints, without which the whale could not use his pyrites. At the climax of the story the men became animals and the shark fled taking with him the flint stones which were transmuted into his teeth.³⁷

These versions place emphasis on the origin of fire relating to conflict between Ancestors, involving the Whale and Shark.

Tindale recorded other elements of the 'Fire myth' in the Warki language of the Goolwa area. Mutabaringga or Cut Hill was one of the homes of the whale man, Kondoli.³⁸ According to Tindale it was derived from *muturi* (sacred), *bari* (river) and *-ingga* (at).³⁹ Kondolinggara or Mount Jagged was where Karilbali (= Krilbali) fought with Kondoli for the possession of fire, wounding him. The place-name was reputedly derived from *kondoli* (whale) and *nggaran* (to assault or wound).⁴⁰ Kondolanang (= Kondolanangg or Brown Hill), where Kondoli emerged from the ground, was said to mean 'refuge of whales', derived from *kondoli* (whale) and *nangare* (refuge or shelter).⁴¹ In another version, Kondoli, after being wounded by Karilbali:

set fire to the country. Hiding first at this place [Kondolanang] he [Kondoli] fled to Kandeining

³¹ According to Tindale (1934-37: 232-233), Yamakawi was related to Kondoli, their hunting grounds adjoined. The quartz stones that Yamakawi left behind when he fled were used for making the jags on spears. Some of these were given to Yamakawi, after he became a shark, for his use as teeth (Tindale 1934-37: 234). Tindale writes 'Yamakawi' as 'Jamakawi'.

³² Tindale ('Myths' folder in 'Milerum' manuscript collection, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) claims that Yamakawi was the White Pointer Shark being who lived at Inman Hill.

³³ Tindale (Geographic Place Names Cards & 'Milerum' manuscript, stage A, no.3. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). This is presumably a Raminjeri version of the myth. Tindale claims that Mootaparinga is erroneously ascribed to Hindmarsh River by Cockburn (1908: 58).

³⁴ See also Tindale (Wunindjeri clan entry in 'Clan Data' folder in 'Milerum' manuscripts, stage 2. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

³⁵ N.B. Tindale (Geographic Place Names Cards, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). Informants not named.

³⁶ This place name is the Nangawooka of Tite, which Tindale (Geographic Place Names Cards, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) claims Cockburn (1908: 63-64) incorrectly translates as 'place of springs'. Informants not named. See also Tindale (Wunindjeri clan entry in 'Clan Data' folder in 'Milerum' manuscripts, stage 2, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

³⁷ N. B. Tindale (no date) 'Strike-a-lights, Fire Flints'. Tindale collection, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

³⁸ Data recorded by Tindale ('Aboriginal Placename Cards', Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) from the Yaraldi informant, Albert Karlowan (Karloan) and the Tangani informant, Clarence Long (Milerum).

³⁹ The derivation of '*muturi*' (sacred) here seems less likely than as '*murta*' (animal excrement) [see footnote 23].

⁴⁰ Data recorded by Tindale ('Aboriginal Placename Cards', Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). Informants not named.

⁴¹ Data recorded by Tindale ('Aboriginal Placename Cards', Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum) from the Yaraldi informant, Mark Wilson (Thalrum or Thrarum) and the Tangani informant, Clarence Long (Milerum).

where he entered the sea as a whale. There a shark being stole his fire flints. A wide spread story.⁴²

After entering the sea, the fire flints were then stolen by Ngarakkani (= Ngarankani) the Shark being and the property of fire making was transferred to grasstrees and wood.⁴³

In 1934 Tindale recorded an account, 'Story of the Stealing of Fire by the Whale' from Mark Wilson in the Yaraldi language.⁴⁴ Here, all the birds and animals, who were then human, met for a ceremony at Mutabaringga. Only Kondoli the Whale possessed fire; he guarded it jealously. Krilbali the Lark and another unnamed bird quarrelled over who should steal it. Kondoli was speared in the head by Krilbali and leaped into a cave on the hill before the fire could be taken from him. The Whale emerged in the deep water at Victor Harbor that is close to the beach and extends to Granite Island. The steam coming from Kondoli's wound was like that coming out of an earth cooking-oven, showing that there was fire inside. The whale still blows its steam out and stranded whales are quite hot, compared with other marine animals which are cold. In the sea, the Shark stole fire from the Whale and gave it to the birds, who were unable to control it and set fire to the country. The raging fire entered the trees, which means that they would now readily burn if set alight. Fire also entered the flints on the ground. Many of the birds got burnt, such as Tuta the Scarlet Robin being who had his breast burnt bright red. After the fire died, people discovered how to make fire from splitting grasstree sticks and rubbing them together and also by striking flints against ironstone pieces.

The anthropologists, Ronald and Catherine Berndt, also provided a record of the Kondoli mythology in the Encounter Bay district (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 16, 118, 235–236, 341–342, 450–451).⁴⁵ The Hindmarsh River area at Victor Harbor is associated with the Whale Ancestor and the origin of making fire with flints, *maki*. The flints were obtained from the Ramindjeri hills people. In the Berndts' version, many people

attended a dance meeting held at Kondilinar, which is inland. When Kondoli the Whale Ancestor danced, sparks came from inside him, which excited the onlookers who were at that time without fire. Krilbali the Brown Skylark and Retjurukuru the Wagtail planned to spear Kondoli whilst he was dancing, to get his fire. Krilbali speared him deep in the back of his neck. Then Krilbali grabbed some of the fire that gushed out of the wound and fled with it. The people assembled there laughed, but Kondoli, Ngarankani (Shark), Mulori (Stingray) and Pungari (Seal) jumped into the water and came out at Latang, near the coast at the mouth of Hindmarsh River.⁴⁶ The Berndts (1993: 311) stated that Latang meant 'place of spearing'.⁴⁷ The Whale stayed at Balgolin (Pultung, Victor Harbor).

One of the Berndt's chief informants for the Kondoli mythology was the Yaraldi speaker, Albert Karloan, from the Manangka descent group. He told the Berndts that the spear thrown at the Whale Ancestor had entered the back of the neck, penetrating as far as the jaw. It was the jaw that produced the sparks. Karloan claimed that when the Whale was speared, the fire that fell on the ground at Kondilinar turned to flints, *maki*, which could be used to make fire. Flints could be also found where the Skylark had dropped them whilst running all over the country. The method of the transference of the fire from the Whale Ancestor to humanity is different from Meyer's earlier account, when a fire-stick made from a grasstree flower stem was used.

The Mountford and Roberts (1969: 40–41) version has details that appear as poetic adjustments to the main recordings. Fire was needed here because the dancers required light to dance at night. The large and powerful Kondoli was the sole owner, but hid the fire. After Kondoli was speared, the people at the ceremony were transformed into animals, such as kangaroos, possums, birds and fish. Kondoli, as the largest man, became the largest animal, the whale. Ngarrindjeri writer, David Unaipon, wrote a story

⁴² Data recorded by Tindale ('Aboriginal Placename Cards', Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). Informants not named. The derivation of Karilbali is here and on other cards recorded as 'maggie-lark being' instead of 'lark', but this clearly an error. See end note 44.

⁴³ Data recorded by Tindale ('Aboriginal Placename Cards', Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). Informants not named.

⁴⁴ Tindale (1930–52: 48, 91, 272–273). In this account, Tindale incorrectly identifies Krilbali as the magpie lark (*Grallina cyanoleuca*). From other sources, including contemporary Aboriginal informants, this term refers to the skylark (*Alauda arvensis*) (Brown 1918: 242; Berndt & Berndt 1993: 235–236, 311, 450–451, 461–462).

⁴⁵ The Berndts write 'Kondoli' as 'Kondili'.

⁴⁶ Many of these Ancestors became *nga:tji* of Ramindjeri clans surrounding Victor Harbor (Berndt & Berndt 1993: 311). *Ngarankani*, shark, was the *nga:tji* of the Ngarakerindjera descent group, based at King Point. In the Tjirbruki mythology he was speared and become the gummy shark (Tindale 1987: 9). *Krilbali*, brown skylark, was the *nga:tji* of Kriibalindjera based near Kondilinar. *Pangari*, seal, was the *nga:tji* of the Ratalwerindjera at Middleton.

⁴⁷ Berndts (1993: 311) claimed that Latang was equivalent to 'Yalla-doola' as listed by Wyatt (1879: 179).

about Wondangar the Whale and Goon na Ghun the Starfish Ancestors.⁴⁸ Although some Ngarrindjeri words are used in the text, the inclusion of a lyrebird, which is a species not found in South Australia, suggests it was intended as a generalised eastern states account.

There are whale mythologies in other parts of southern South Australia that bear some resemblance to the Kondoli myth. The existence of the Whale Ancestor as a land-based person appears widespread. Schurmann recorded in the Adelaide Plains region that:

Nganno – travelled far and wide, seeking the murderers of his son, Gurltatakko, and while travelling named the country as we know it today. After killing the murderers he went home but his tribesmen on seeing him panicked and ran in fear into the sea where they were transformed into sea creatures. He told them not to do it but they responded ‘I am a shark’, ‘I am a whale’ etc. Nganno turned himself into a sea monster at the end (Schurmann Journals, 21 August 1839).

It is interesting to note that many of the terms and place-names used in the Lower Murray versions above are derived from the Aboriginal vocabulary of Adelaide. In the Tjirbruki mythology of Gulf St Vincent and western Encounter Bay, some of the Ancestors ran into the sea to become species of shark (Tindale 1987: 9). The language used in this account recorded by Tindale is a mixture of Adelaide and Lower Murray vocabulary.

Stealing the ability to make fire is a common theme in the mythology of Aboriginal Australia. There are other accounts that appear structurally similar to the Kondoli myths discussed above, but do not involve whales as one of the primary Ancestors. For example, in a version of a Western Desert myth recorded by Tindale, the Turkey Bustard Ancestor kept fire to himself and fled south towards the Southern Ocean at Eucla to place the flints under the water.⁴⁹ The Hawk Men rescued the flints, which are accessible today only at low tide on calm days. Similarly, Smith (1880: 18–20) records that the Boondik people between Mount Gambier and MacDonnell Bay in the South East of South Australia believed that fire

was once the sole property of Mar the Cockatoo, and was hidden on his head. At a meeting, people argued over how to find out more about Mar’s fire. Several people attempted to spy on Mar making the fire. As a result, Tatkanna the Robin Red Breast had his chest singed red from the heat of Mar’s fire. When fire was at last caught in a grasstree stick, it spread to the grass and dry underwood where it started a bushfire. Mar rushed to where the others were camped and a fight started. One of those there, a large man named Kounterbull, received a deep spear wound in the back of his neck. He rushed into the sea where, as a whale, he was afterwards to be seen spouting water from his wound. In Western Victoria, Crows had fire and the Fairy Wren and Hawk stole it (Dawson 1881: 54). In the West Coast district of South Australia, Aboriginal people possibly perceived whales as having a more sinister character. In the Mirniny language, whales were called *muburn kailgaburdi*, with *muburn* (or *moburn*) recorded as ‘devil’.⁵⁰ Tindale claimed that there ‘are several versions of the [fire] story extending as far to the west as Perth and to the Tangane kald on the Coorong’.⁵¹ He cites the record of Grey (1839: 76) from the South West of Western Australia that lists *maad-jit-teeyl* as a ‘magic stone’ of the shark. Tindale also provided an account from the Murray Basin where a small species of hawk stole an ember from the shark as he was entering the sea and placed it for safe keeping in a grasstree.⁵² The similarity of the events in widespread accounts of this myth, along with the variety of language chosen by the informants to communicate them, make it difficult to determine the origin and range of the whale myths.

The Kondoli mythology of the Lower Murray has important cultural insights into both methods of fire-making. The use of fire-sticks in what is referred to as the rotation method is widespread across Australia. Tindale describes this process in the southern regions:

Fire making is practised using a dry grasstree flower stalk, the ‘male’, twirled into a split section of the same stalk, in which usually a notch has been cut. This is the ‘female’. Tinder is placed below the

⁴⁸ Unaipon, no date (Davis *et al.* 1990: 33–52).

⁴⁹ N. B. Tindale (no date) ‘Strike-a-lights, Fire Flints’. Tindale collection, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

⁵⁰ D. M. Bates, ‘Native Vocabulary, Eucla District’, Barr Smith Library, University of Adelaide (box XII, 2A 4–5). According to Bates the shark appears to have been called by a related term, *kailga-kailga*. Similarly, the porpoise was *kailga-ailga* and the trapdoor spider was *kailga wurdi*.

⁵¹ Data recorded by Tindale (‘Aboriginal Placename Cards’, Warki Language, AA338, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum). The informants are not named. Tindale (1930–52: 273) lists Grey 1839 as a record relating to the Kondoli fire myth.

⁵² N. B. Tindale (no date) ‘Strike-a-lights, Fire Flints’. Tindale collection, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

notch which supplements the hot powdered pith engendered by the rotary process. When a spark appears it is deftly transferred to a ball of dry, teased grass or other easily ignitable matter.⁵³

In the same reference, Tindale added that fine stone grit was sometimes placed in the female part of the apparatus to help fire-making by increasing friction. The use of percussion methods to make fire, generally by striking flint, together with 'ironstone' or iron pyrites, has been recorded in some parts of South Australia. In the Coorong region, Tindale's Tangani informant, Milerum, told him that flint, *marti*, was used for fire-making and came by way of trade from south of Cape Jaffa.⁵⁴ The flint was used by striking it across iron pyrites, *baruke*, that came from the Mount Lofty Ranges at a place called Whale Hill, just to the north of the western boundary of the Tangani speakers. Powdered sun dried kangaroo dung, fungus, bark and sandalwood scrapings were used as tinder (*narn*) and kept wrapped in possum fur. Although this method of fire-making was rarely recorded, Charles P. Mountford and Ronald M. Berndt (1941: 343–344) use the Karloan version of the Kondoli myth as proof that the percussion method existed in Australia before Europeans arrived. The Tjirbruki mythology of the Adelaide plains also mentions the use of iron pyrites in making fire (Tindale 1987).

EUROPEAN SETTLEMENT

In the first few months of the official British settlement of South Australia in 1836, Encounter Bay came under scrutiny as a possible site for the capital of South Australia. The large harbour and the proximity of a supposed navigable entrance to the Murray River were major factors in its favour. Nevertheless, it was Encounter Bay's suitability for whaling activities that started settlement there. Captain John Hart, who was familiar with the South Australian coast through his whaling and sealing activities during the early 1830s, was consulted by the South Australian Colonisation Commissioners in London (Blackett 1911: 431).⁵⁵

Whaling was the first official industry in the Colony of South Australia. Two 'shore' whaling stations were set up in Encounter Bay in 1837 – a group from Sydney headed by Captain Blenkinsopp and the other controlled by the South Australia Company.⁵⁶ The former was situated at Police Point (now Victor Harbor), and the latter at the foot of the ridge connecting Rosetta Head (now The Bluff) with the hills. Other stations were later set up at The Nob (now Port Elliot) and on Granite Island. In the case of the whaling establishments at Police Point and Granite Island, these were considered to be of 'lesser importance' and soon abandoned (Newland 1921: 16).

Maritime archaeological and historical studies have produced a list of whaling stations across the coast line of South Australia (Angas 1847a, text for plate XVI; Hosking 1973, legend: 2; Kostoglou & McCarthy 1991, Table 1, p.67). There were large whaling stations situated in Encounter Bay at Rosetta Head (1837 to 1855) and Freeman Nob (about 1840). On Kangaroo Island there were establishments at Hog Bay (1841 to 1844) and D'Estrees Bay (1843 to 1844). There were also smaller whaling stations at the mouth of the Onkaparinga River (from 1841 to about 1843) and at Fishery Cove near Cape Jervis (from 1842 to the early 1850s). Several establishments were present on the West Coast of South Australia at Thistle Island (1838 to 1839), Fowler Bay (1840s), Saint Peter Island (1840s), Streaky Bay (1843 to 1846) and Trial Bay (1845). In the South East of South Australia, there was the Rivoli Bay Station (1830s intermittently to the 1880s).

Two species of whale were commercially hunted in southern South Australia, the sperm or cachalot whale (*Physeter macrocephalus*) and the southern right whale (*Eubalaena australis*).⁵⁷ There were two distinct seasons for European whaling, referred to as 'in-shore' and 'off-shore'. The 'in-shore season' was during winter, with the southern right whales caught as they travelled along the coast of south eastern Australia from Tasmania (Fig. 1). This was known as 'bay whaling'. The 'off-shore season' aimed to catch

⁵³ N. B. Tindale (no date) 'Strike-a-lights, Fire Flints'. Tindale collection, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

⁵⁴ N. B. Tindale (no date) 'Strike-a-lights, Fire Flints'. Tindale collection, miscellaneous papers, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum.

⁵⁵ In 1831, Captain Hart left a sealer at Baudin Rocks in the South East of South Australia (Kostoglou & McCarthy 1991: 63). After official British settlement in 1836, Hart became a successful merchant and politician in South Australia. He was Premier of the colony on three occasions (Blackett 1911: 431–432).

⁵⁶ 'Report on Whaling in South Australia' (1841 [reprinted in *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, South Australian Branch*, 1921: 15–20]) and Cameron (1979: 23). Newland (1936) gives a fictional account of whaling in the region in 'Paving the Way.'

⁵⁷ For descriptions of South Australian whaling practices refer to 'Report on Whaling in South Australia' (1841 [1921]), Hosking (1973, explanatory note: 1), Glover & Ling (1976), Whitelock (1985: 61, 64), Kostoglou & McCarthy (1991: 1–2) and Judd et al (1992: 13–14).

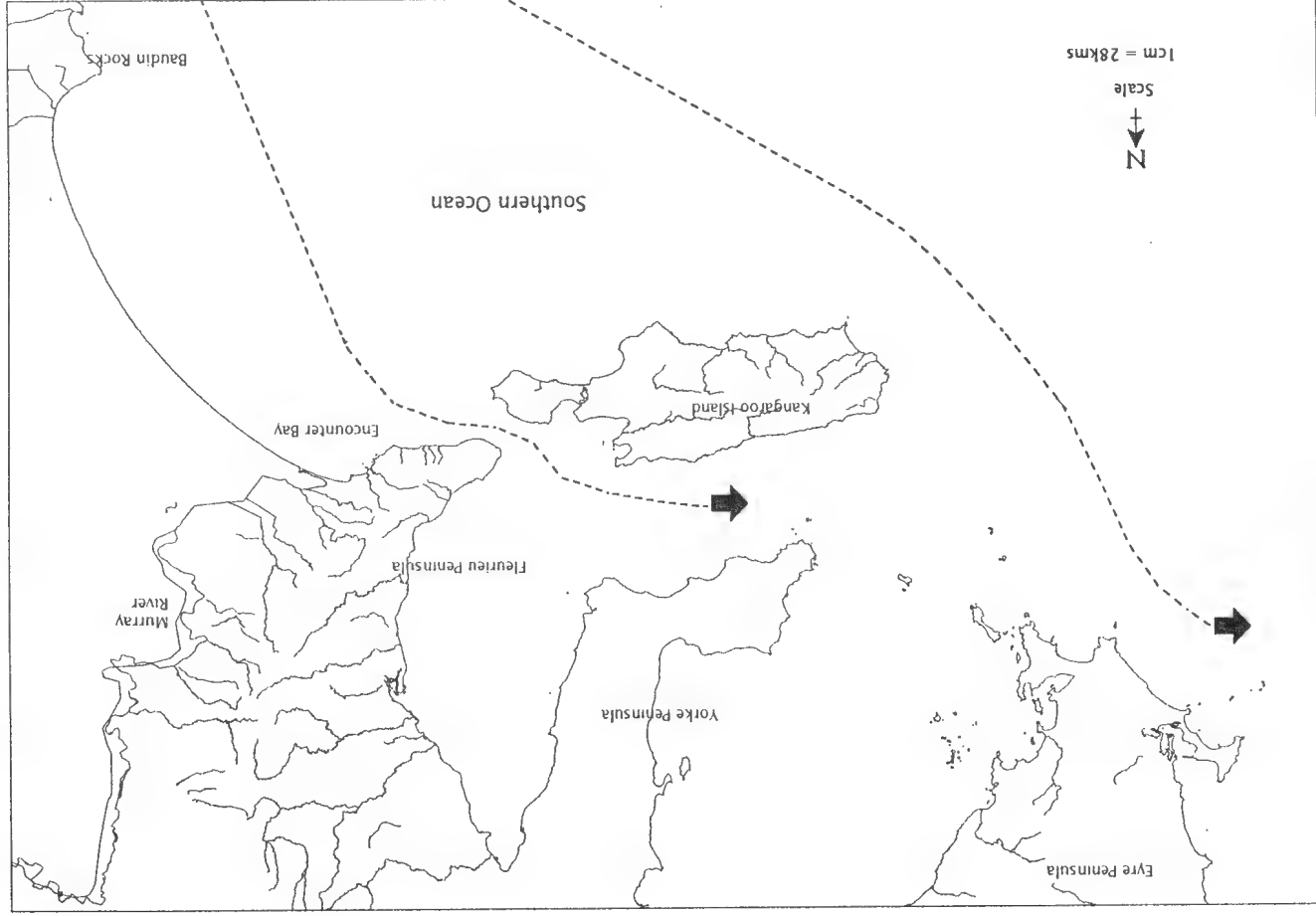


FIGURE 1. The possible winter migration routes of the southern right whale.

whales as they were returning from the west about 320 kilometres off the coast beyond the continental shelf. Sperm whales were generally only caught offshore, although, as with other whale species, they occasionally stranded along the coast. The 'off-shore' whaling was more expensive than 'bay whaling', as deep-sea activities required bigger boats. Whitelock (1985: 63) states that from 1836 to the end of 1840, 536 barrels of southern right whale oil, 158 barrels of sperm oil, and 655 bundles of whale bone were exported from Encounter Bay to London via Hobart.

IMPACT OF WHALING UPON ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

European whalers operating in South Australian waters utilised Aboriginal labour, being cheaply available when required (see Clarke 1996, 1998). For instance, it was reported in an Adelaide newspaper in 1839 that:

We are rejoiced to hear that the fishery at Encounter Bay is proceeding most prosperously, nearly 300 tons of oil having been already obtained. A fact connected with it has been communicated to us which is of an interesting and not unimportant nature. It appears that a boat is employed in the fishery which is entirely manned with natives. They take their part in the occupation equally with the white men, and are found to be not less expert than they. If the aboriginal inhabitants are competent to this laborious species of employment, what should prevent them being rendered efficient in many other paths of industry.⁵⁸

Furthermore, in 1846 Aboriginal people manned a boat run by Barton at Encounter Bay.⁵⁹ In the 1830s, the Kangaroo Island sealers knew an elderly Aboriginal man called Kondoy (Condoy), who was described as being a 'tribal chief' and apparently lived at Cape Jervis.⁶⁰ It is possible that this man's name referred to the whale. Since Kondoy was a senior member of his descent group, he may have taken on the identity of their main *nga:tji*, a whale. The sealers were part of a seafaring population originating in various Northern Hemisphere and Pacific countries. They and their Aboriginal wives were engaged in

various enterprises that were reliant on passing vessels, such as gathering salt, growing vegetables and the hunting wallabies, kangaroos and seals for their skins. On the frontier, the whalers and sealers were opportunistic. They were also the first direct contact that Aboriginal people had with Europeans. For example, in May or June 1838, whalers on the *Elizabeth* were blown ashore at the north end of Rivoli Bay (Stewart n.d. [1977: 78–79, 89]). They set up a station there, which attracted Aboriginal people looking for food. On at least one occasion these whalers rowed out in a boat to Penguin Rock with Aboriginal women, who caught for them the fat birds after which the islet was named. Similarly, Davies (cited Tindale 1986: 235) recorded a song in the Wirangu language that records the careening of a whaling boat at Denial Bay in the West Coast of South Australia.

From the outset, the whaling station at Encounter Bay attracted large numbers of Aboriginal people. Gouger (1838: 53) claims that the establishment of the whale fishery at Encounter Bay had made this area a favourite residence of Aboriginal people during the whaling season (presumably referring to the winter time). Penney noted this seasonal movement in November 1840, when he observed Aboriginal people leaving Encounter Bay and heading east. Penney reports:

I found the natives going or preparing to go to the Lower Murray. The natives of the Lower Murray tribes usually return at the end of the Whaling season, accompanied by some of the Encounter Bay tribe, to their stations on this river ...⁶¹

Leigh (1839: 163–164) describes how upon the capture of a whale, the local Aboriginal people came to the stations for feasts. A painting by George French Angas shows whalebones being used as the framework of an Aboriginal hut at the Encounter Bay whaling stations (Fig. 2). Cameron (1979: 4) suggests that the whalers encouraged local Aboriginal people to camp around the whaling station by distributing whale-meat and rum, so that the white men had access to Aboriginal women. In the 1840s, Richard Penney and David Wark treated Aboriginal people

⁵⁸ *The Southern Australian* newspaper, 1 August 1839.

⁵⁹ *The South Australian Register* newspaper, 8 August 1846. Aboriginal involvement in the whaling industry is noted elsewhere in Australia during the 1840s, with Aboriginal whalers present at Twofold Bay in southern New South Wales (Davidson & Davidson 1988: 25–34).

⁶⁰ See Thomas (1925: 45–46) and Clarke (1998: 39). Also see *The Advertiser* newspaper, 27 December 1886. An elderly Aboriginal man named 'Kondoy' is a character in Cawthorne's 'Kangaroo Islanders' (Cawthorne 1854 [1926: 110–111]).

⁶¹ Transcript of a letter from Penney to the Governor of South Australia, 7 January 1841. (Group 787; 1841, no.8 – AA309, Stirling collection, Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).



FIGURE 2. Aboriginal people living in camps on the edge of the Encounter Bay whaling stations used whale bones to make their shelters (G. French Angas watercolour, 1844 [lithograph version published in Angas 1847b, plate LVI]).

suffering from small pox and venereal diseases at Encounter Bay (Jenkin 1979: 46–49). Penney was concerned about the ill treatment of Aboriginal people by whalers. Of the Encounter Bay people, he said:

There are many individuals of this tribe, who have been content, whilst there was any employment, to live for months at the fisheries, and to do the work of whalers; and one was, the last season, rated amongst the crew of the chief headsman, Thomas, being considered as a good a hand as many of the white people.⁶²

The German missionary, Heinrich A.E. Meyer, operated a school for Aboriginal people near the whaling station.⁶³ The Lower Murray people living there were among the colony's first Aboriginal 'fringe dwellers', although at this stage they were

essentially opportunistic rather than dispossessed.

At the Encounter Bay whale fishery, it is claimed that Aboriginal men were employed to cart blubber to pots where Aboriginal women boiled it up in vats (Cameron 1979: 39).⁶⁴ Payment was usually made in gin and tobacco. The whalers employed at least one Aboriginal man, named Charlie Warner, as a 'spotter'.⁶⁵ He was a member of the Kondoli clan and it was said that Warner could also sing the whales to come in or to go out. The whalers believed in his abilities, paying him with rations. On one occasion, Warner did not receive his payment through an oversight. Sustie Wilson, an Aboriginal whaler, claimed:

So Charlie Warner ran out to a rock near the sea, and began his chanting. A huge whale which was lying in the bay vanished in a few seconds. The

⁶² Penney, *The South Australian Register* newspaper, 21 November 1840.

⁶³ Penney mentions a 'Rev. Mr Myers of Encounter Bay' [= H.A.E. Meyer] who was 'improving the natives' and studying their language (*The South Australian Register* newspaper, 26 June 1841).

⁶⁴ The origin of the historical source for this reference is not clear.

⁶⁵ *The Mail*, 19 August 1932.

whaling crew dashed out, but could not even find the wake which is usually left by the whales. They returned, and went to old Charlie, and give him his rations. He said, 'Now you catch him. You go back same place this afternoon. You catch him all right.' The same afternoon, they found the whale in the same place. I often saw him bring whales into the bay, as well.⁶⁶

Aboriginal men, such as One Arm Charley, Peter and Encounter Bay Bob, had experience in the whaling and sealing industries, dating back to before official European settlement (see Clarke 1991: 98–100; 1996: 56–59; 1998: 37). After 1836, when European colonists arrived at Encounter Bay, these men became important agents employed by the Europeans as trackers, guides and translators.⁶⁷

In the second half of the nineteenth century, some Aboriginal men were still engaged as whalers (Taplin Journals, 5 May & 22 July 1861). In 1932 an Aboriginal whaler, Sustie Wilson, claimed that many of the whalers from the 'Encounter Bay tribe' were much better than the Europeans. He was reported to have said that this 'was because they had been throwing spears all their lives, and took to harpooning naturally.'⁶⁸ Throughout the whaling industry, the use of Indigenous harpooners seems to have been the practice with some teams.⁶⁹ During the operation of the whale fishery on Granite Island, Aboriginal people were employed to take wood and drinking water out to the island along a connecting reef during low tide (Hodge 1932: 124). Whaling was hazardous employment. For example, when Sustie Wilson was still quite young and working in a whaling crew, their boat was dragged about nineteen kilometres out to sea by a huge whale. Sustie claimed that it 'took two days and two nights to row back ... it was hard going too, especially when the wind was against us. Not many of the young men of today could have done it.'⁷⁰

Transactions between Europeans and Aboriginal people did not always occur freely. During the 1837 season, a European named

Driscoll was travelling on a 'native pad' overland from Encounter Bay to Adelaide when he was murdered by 'waddy' (club) near Hindmarsh Valley by his Aboriginal guide, Reppindjeri, known by Europeans as 'Elic' (Cameron 1979: 4, 28, 39–42; Jenkin 1979: 52–55; Castles & Harris 1987: 11–13).⁷¹ This had resulted from a quarrel over Driscoll's apparent refusal to pay for sex with one of Elic's two Aboriginal women. The slain man was a whaler with Captain Blenkinsopp. Although the Aboriginal people involved kept the circumstances quiet, a local Aboriginal woman, Kalinga, who Europeans called 'Sarah', leaked the facts. She was the wife of a Kangaroo Island sealer and whaler, Walker. Reppindjeri was arrested by Walker and imprisoned by authorities for some months on the *South Australian* moored near the Bluff, before he allegedly escaped and disappeared.

Some Aboriginal people in the Lower Murray area apparently considered that there was an advantage in working with European colonists. At Encounter Bay in the 1840s Penney stated that:

The Encounter Bay natives have been properly brought up, they have never been accustomed to get anything, without working for it, and this has not only made them more industrious, but also made them pay that attention to the instruments and proceedings of Europeans, that renders them almost equal to them as general labourers.⁷²

This integration into a European pattern may well have been due in part to the disruption of hunting and gathering practices through European occupation of the land. Tindale blames early settlement by the whalers for loss of knowledge of indigenous place-names amongst Aboriginal people. He states:

Since occupation of much of the western head waters of the two rivers [Hindmarsh and Inman] had ceased after the early visits of white whalers, the names of places there never learned [by his Aboriginal informants].⁷³

⁶⁶ *The Mail* newspaper, 19 August 1932.

⁶⁷ See Pullen's account (*The South Australian Register* newspaper, 15 August 1840) of the investigations, involving the assistance of these three men, over the massacre of the *Maria* wreck survivors.

⁶⁸ *The Mail* newspaper, 19 August 1932.

⁶⁹ In the fiction of 'Moby Dick or The Whale', the main harpooner, Queequeg, was a Maori man (Melville 1851).

⁷⁰ *The Mail* newspaper, 19 August 1932.

⁷¹ The 'native pad' was a feature of the Aboriginal landscape that Europeans started to use. Meyer (1843: 52) refers to an Aboriginal song about 'a fine road ... winding between the hills' between Encounter Bay and Willunga. This was possibly the trail that Watts Newland and his party were taken on when two Aboriginal people guided them from Adelaide to Encounter Bay in 1839 (Robinson 1975: 21). In the case of the Encounter Bay track, this was originally just over half a metre wide, and so its use by Europeans was initially confined to foot and horse traffic (Sweetman 1928 [1988: 4]). Eventually, however, it was widened for use by coaches.

⁷² *The Examiner* newspaper, 28 January 1843.

⁷³ Tindale (Wunindjeri clan entry in 'Clan Data' folder in 'Milerum' manuscripts, stage 2. Anthropology Archives, S.A. Museum).

The pre-European culture of the northern parts of the Lower Murray region was, by the twentieth century, poorly known due to early European settlement there (see Clarke 1994: 58, 227–231, 241–242).

At Encounter Bay, Aboriginal people adapted to the new situation, quickly gaining skills in a wide range of European practices. Penney claimed:

that many of them can use the axe and the saw, and have been employed in cutting posts and rails for fencing, and two or three can drive bullock-drays; they are all of them very useful in tracking cattle and horses – they are very good hands in a boat, and in diving – and they have rendered great services to owners of the wrecks at Encounter Bay.⁷⁴

When a drowning occurred in the Encounter Bay and Lower Murray region, Aboriginal people invariably assisted in the recovery of the bodies (Linn 1988: 60).⁷⁵ Although Meyer ran an Aboriginal School at Victor Harbor (from 1840 to about 1846), Aboriginal people were relatively free to work for European colonists.⁷⁶ Encounter Bay people were frequent visitors to the Adelaide region in the 1840s.⁷⁷ Even with the establishment of the Point McLeay Aboriginal Mission in 1859, Aboriginal people in the Lower Murray region still moved around fairly freely.

Whaling declined in the early 1840s as gaslight in the Northern Hemisphere challenged the use of candles and oil lamps (Blainey 1977: 115). The use of whale oil declined further when kerosene from American oil wells became available (Hosking 1973, chap.2: 9, 32–35; Whitelock 1985: 66). The decreasing value of whale products led to the South Australia Company pulling out in 1842 (Cameron 1979: 23). By this time, European activities had already denuded much of the hills behind the whaling stations at Encounter Bay ('Baleineau', cited in Whitelock 1985: 65). Seasons of whaling continued sporadically up to the 1870s. In about 1870, whaling recommenced at Encounter Bay, after stopping in the 1860s (Hodge 1932: 127). For two seasons there was an Aboriginal crew on the whaling boats. Aboriginal labour became crucial to the colony at times when European labour was too expensive and scarce. Aboriginal people were

considered suitable for employment that demanded heavy use of the body. Nevertheless, in 1871 only one whale was killed and towed to the Bluff Station (Whitelock 1985: 66). In the early twentieth century, Aboriginal people in the Lower Murray area were able, on at least one occasion, to actively hunt a whale. They killed a 5.6 metre female whale trapped near Rabbit Island in the Coorong system. Parts of it were dragged into a boat, cut up and distributed among the people at the Point McLeay Mission (Ely 1980).

DISCUSSION

Versions of the Kondoli mythology establish that the main players were Ancestors and associated spirit familiars of various descent groups in the Encounter Bay area of the Lower Murray cultural region. Here, the whale mythology, although existing in many different forms, was used by Aboriginal people to explain the origin and making of fire. The involvement of particular bird ancestors and the shark vary widely across the corpus of this mythology. There are also parallels between these myths and others that do not involve the whale. In the coastal regions of southern Australia, the observation of whales spouting and the recognition of their warm bloodedness appear to have been major elements in the mythology. There is insufficient data for areas of coastal South Australia outside the Lower Murray to determine the totemic significance of whales, but there is an indication that whale strandings provided other coastal Aboriginal groups with occasional feasts of food. The records of who had access to the meat of stranded whales indicate that Aboriginal people had a system of determining ownership of food resources originating from the sea.

From the early nineteenth century, Aboriginal people were being incorporated into the world economy through their participation in the marine industries controlled from the Northern Hemisphere. European colonists used indigenous people as a cheap labour force. Aboriginal people in the Encounter Bay and Adelaide areas, through

⁷⁴ *The South Australian* newspaper, 21 November 1840.

⁷⁵ On 12 December 1837, Aboriginal people dragged the two surviving members of Captain Blenkinsopp's exploration party from the Murray Mouth in a whaleboat (*The South Australian Register* newspaper, 20 January 1838; Gouger 1838: 42–45; Hahn 1838–1839 [1964: 130]; Hosking 1973, chap.1: 21–22; Cameron 1979: 4, 28). In June 1838 Aboriginal people from east of the Murray Mouth assist the survivors of the wrecked 'Fanny' to return to Victor Harbor (*The South Australian Register* newspaper, 25 August & 8 September 1838).

⁷⁶ Meyer left the Encounter Bay district in 1848 and settled at Bethany in the Barossa Valley (Cameron 1979: 48).

⁷⁷ *The Observer* newspaper, 27 April 1844.

their interaction with the sealers and whalers, were the first groups in South Australia to gain extensive experience of Europeans. Thus whaling at Encounter Bay provided the background to Aboriginal and European interaction during the British colonisation of South Australia.

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